

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 3, 2022

Simon Allen
Chief Executive Officer
McGraw Hill
1325 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10019

Bethlam Forsa
Chief Executive Officer
Savvas Learning Company
15 E Midland Avenue Suite 502
Paramus, NJ, 07652

Michael Hansen
Chief Executive Officer
Cengage Group
200 Pier 4 Boulevard
Boston, MA 02210

John “Jack” Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
125 High Street
Boston, MA 02110

Dear Mr. Allen, Ms. Forsa, Mr. Hansen, and Mr. Lynch:

The Florida Department of Education recently rejected more than 50 math textbooks for use in its K-12 schools after determining that they contained “prohibited topics,” such as “tenants (*sic*) of [Critical Race Theory] or other unsolicited strategies of indoctrination.”¹ The State provided no evidence for these claims and appears to be engaged in nothing more than a bigoted censorship campaign designed to frighten parents, stoke racial grievance, and bully textbook publishers into submission. Given the leverage large states like Florida have over the content of school textbooks used throughout the United States, we are deeply concerned that any changes made to appease their demands will affect the quality of public education in New Jersey and other states.

In one particularly troubling instance, in the guise of enforcing its ban on “Critical Race Theory”² in K-12 textbooks, Florida’s Department of Education appears to have banned a math textbook for briefly highlighting the biographies of two prominent African American mathematicians.³ One of those mathematicians was Dorothy Vaughan, herself a former math teacher, who led a computing unit for the agency we now know as NASA. Vaughan, who joined the agency at the start of World War II and who was originally forced to work in a racially segregated setting with separate bathrooms and dining areas from her white colleagues, made significant contributions to the U.S. Space Program during her 28-year career.⁴ That the State of Florida – home to NASA’s Kennedy Space Center – appears intent on shielding students from the contributions of Vaughan is disgraceful.

¹ Florida Department of Education, “Florida Rejects Publishers’ Attempts to Indoctrinate Students.” April 15, 2022. <https://www.fldoe.org/newsroom/latest-news/florida-rejects-publishers-attempts-to-indoctrinate-students.shtml>

² We note that Critical Race Theory (CRT) has its roots in legal academic scholarship and is absent from the content of K-12 schooling. The entire debate around CRT and K-12 schooling is a politically motivated approach to limiting purposeful, developmentally appropriate discussions about race and the teaching of important, complex history.

³ Legum, Judd, Tesnim Zekeria, and Rebecca Crosby. “Inside the ‘dangerous’ math textbooks DeSantis claims would ‘indoctrinate students.’” Popular Information, April 21, 2022. <https://popular.info/p/inside-the-dangerous-math-textbooks?s=w>

⁴ NASA, “Dorothy Vaughan Biography.” <https://www.nasa.gov/content/dorothy-vaughan-biography>

These censorship efforts in Florida are emblematic of broader censorship trends coursing through the country. In Texas, activists took over the board of a local public library, closed their meetings to the public, and started removing books from shelves that they deemed to be objectionable, including iconic children's classics like Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen*.⁵ In Tennessee, a school board banned the teaching of *Maus*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about the Holocaust – a move the regional chapter of the Anti-Defamation League rightly called “shameful on every conceivable level” and that “serves no purpose other than to rob the next generation of knowledge.”⁶⁷ In Ohio, a school forbade an author and illustrator from reading a book to students titled *It's Okay to Be a Unicorn*, which conveys the simple but important message that it's okay to be different.⁸

In the weeks and months to come, there will be significant commercial pressures put on you as leading publishers to produce textbooks that appeal to politicians in Florida and elsewhere, and to bend to their censorship demands. We urge you to be transparent with the public about any changes you are asked to make in response to such demands. More specifically, we ask that you share with our offices a letter indicating what changes you have made to any educational materials provided to public K-12 schools as a result of the Florida law. Please provide a list of each product changed, and a description of each change.

Furthermore, if you comply with such demands to alter textbooks based on the Florida law or similar legislation in other states, we ask that you continue to make available the original, uncensored textbooks to schools in New Jersey and other states. We are proud of having some of the highest rated public schools in the country in our state, and we will not stand for lowering our educational standards and learning opportunities for our students, based on the divisive politics of censorship from politicians in Florida, Texas or anywhere else.

We strongly agree that educational content should be appropriate to the ages of children to which it is taught. Yet, we should celebrate, not obfuscate, teaching students that successful African American mathematicians exist and have contributed richly to the American story. Schools aren't protecting or benefiting students by hiding the horrors of the Holocaust from them. And acknowledging that some of us are different from one another isn't some form of woke indoctrination – it's a plainly obvious and important truth. We urge you to remain focused on producing educational materials for students that will equip them with the skills and tools they need to succeed academically, and to not bend to the censorship demands of cynical politicians for whom the real motivation is ending public education and dividing the people they're supposed to lead.

Sincerely,



Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

⁵ Gowen, Annie. “Censorship battles’ new frontier: Your public library.” The Washington Post, April 17, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/04/17/public-libraries-books-censorship/>

⁶ Gross, Jenny. “School Board in Tennessee Bans Teaching of Holocaust Novel ‘Maus.’” The New York Times, January 27, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/27/us/maus-banned-holocaust-tennessee.html>

⁷ ADL Southeast (@ADLSoutheast). January 26, 2022, 7:02pm. <https://twitter.com/adlsoutheast/status/1486489739033202694?lang=en>

⁸ Peiser, Jaclyn. “An author was set to read his unicorn book to students. The school forbade it.” The Washington Post, April 14, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/04/14/unicorn-book-jason-tharp-ohio/>



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

cc: Maria Pallante, President and CEO, Association of American Publishers